



Wisconsin Department of Transportation

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Jim Doyle
Governor

Frank J. Busalacchi
Secretary

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May 3, 2005

The Honorable Scott Fitzgerald
Senate Chair, Joint Committee on Finance
317 East, State Capitol
Madison, WI 53702

The Honorable Dean Kaufert
Assembly Chair, Joint Committee on Finance
308 East, State Capitol
Madison, WI 53702

Dear Senator Fitzgerald and Representative Kaufert:

I am writing to ask for your support of the Governor's budget request for Hiawatha passenger rail service funding. The Hiawatha service connects Milwaukee and Chicago providing seven round trips per day with stops in downtown Milwaukee, Milwaukee's General Mitchell International Airport, Sturtevant, Glenview, IL, and Chicago's Union Station. The service provides an important link between the two cities fostering many economic benefits for Southeastern Wisconsin as well as providing a crucial transportation option for the state's citizens.

In fact, the Hiawatha service continues to set records for ridership. In March 2005, 46,202 people rode the Hiawatha – the highest monthly passenger total in the 16-year history of state support for the service. This follows the previous record month of December 2004 when ridership totaled 45,791. The rail station at General Mitchell International Airport, which opened on January 18, 2005, saw a 54 percent increase in passengers between February and March. For fiscal year 2005 through March, Hiawatha ridership has totaled 371,330 – a 9.5 percent increase over the same period in 2004. When you consider that 2004 was itself a record year, providing 453,611 rides, the continuing increase in ridership and popularity of the Hiawatha service is quite evident. To top it off, the Hiawatha has experienced the best on-time performance of any Amtrak route in the nation. These numbers provide clear evidence that our investments in quality transportation services and facilities pay dividends in the form of enhanced public mobility and overall economic growth. The numbers also show the importance of passenger rail as part of our comprehensive transportation system.

As you and the other members of the Joint Committee on Finance are considering the Department's budget for the 2005-07 biennium, please keep in mind the importance of the Amtrak Hiawatha passenger rail service to the state in providing economic benefits and as a transportation option. The increases requested in Governor Doyle's budget request will ensure that the service continues in 2006 and 2007 at current levels. Providing funding increases at levels lower than those in the Governor's request could cause reductions in service or possibly discontinued service for parts of the year.

Thank you for your consideration on this issue. If you have questions on this or other transportation issues, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Frank J. Busalacchi", written in a cursive style.

Frank J. Busalacchi
Secretary

cc: Governor Jim Doyle
Members of the Joint Committee on Finance